

In Washington:

CIA Basically Sound But Needs Review

By CHARLES BARTLETT

WASHINGTON—The Central Intelligence Agency has been such a beating in the wake of the Cuban fiasco that it is surprising to find the real finger of blame moving toward the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

These eminences of the military structure did not conceive, and plan the operation. This was done by a group of energetic and able men in the CIA who made the great mistake of falling in love with their project as they lived with it.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, a body of five top military leaders buttressed by a huge staff of junior officers and technicians, lived with Project Cuba from the time it was conceived last June. They are by nature a militant body of men and they cottoned readily to the idea of taking steps against Fidel Castro.

Adm. Arleigh Burke, the outspoken naval representative on the JCS, was particularly keen for the move. Burke is a true militarist, a man who really believes that force is the answer to most problems.

HE HAS urged more than one president to let go with the bomb in a tight military situation and accounts of his views suggest that he holds little fear of a nuclear holocaust. Burke was a prime mover in Project Cuba, although it must be said in fairness that he did not, as far as can be learned, urge resort to the bomb against the bearded dictator.

The JCS had a peculiar relationship with Project Cuba. They watched it closely at first but in the final stages, became less painstaking in their reviews. This was unfortunate because President Kennedy trimmed the program as its time of execution neared and he refused to interfere. This was a

became increasingly convinced that U.S. forces must avoid direct involvement. The factor of U.S. air cover for the beachhead was thus eliminated in this final period.

Despite this trimming of the force that was to be applied, the JCS gave the President their full endorsement of the battle plan and it was upon this certification by his top military experts that he leaned most heavily in his final assent to the landing. He did not know until later that the JCS had studied the final plans with their modifications for less than an hour before signing the endorsement which went to the White House.

ALL of this is a prelude to an analysis of the situation in which the CIA now finds itself. The personal symbol of the CIA is 68-year-old Allen Dulles, a man who has devoted much of his life to espionage, and has evoked deep respect and affection from people with whom he has worked. He is, as Robert Kennedy remarked after a week of close and sensitive relations with him, "a real man" and he has the admiration of major figures in Washington from the President down.

Among those unacquainted with his personal quality, a degree of skepticism has developed in recent years as a result of Cuba, the U2 incident, the construction of a peculiarly obtrusive building for the agency on the Potomac River, and a general sense that he has tended to court publicity.

He was not a key figure in Project Cuba although he must, as Kennedy must, carry the responsibility for it. The plans and enthusiasm came from a younger group of men who communicated their enthusiasm to the younger men in the White House and created, with the help of the President's activist approach toward Cuba, a momentum with which Dulles was clearly reluctant to interfere. This was a

failure in communication, a problem that one observes between older men and Kennedy, whose mind runs so fast that it tends to seem impatient of the digressions that come with age.

BUT right now there is great public impatience with CIA. Some wise men want to see a head roll as human propitiation for the errors that were made. Some want the agency abolished so that it can begin again under new cover and with some fresh faces. Almost everyone with the probable exception of Mr. Dulles would like to see the huge new building turned over to another agency.

This is a touchy problem for the President. If he goes too far in his punishments and reorganizations, he will jeopardize the surviving good in the structure and make good men difficult to keep and impossible to recruit. He can have a new director without any reorganizations as Dulles is ready to retire and his man will have the opportunity to mold the agency to his taste.

But the CIA is not, according to the best information one can get, a really bad organization at present. The well-bred young men who seemed to dominate its early days have disappeared or grown tough. The morale has been high, and the agency has many bright spots. The task is to find the weak spots and eliminate them and one big step to that end might well be the creation of a joint congressional committee to review its activities. This has worked well for the Atomic Energy Commission and the quality of security has been well preserved by conscientious senators and House members.

But the CIA does the new bloom as a major cancer in the federal system. It is much larger than it looks at present. The real improvement will derive from Kennedy's development of a civilian military advisers on whom he can rely implicitly.